

BEST PRACTICES

USS *Kitty Hawk* Sailors Play To Win

By Cdr. Jim Koeltzow,
USS *Kitty Hawk* (CV-63)

It's late in the fourth quarter, with your favorite NFL team leading, but instead of aggressively going for a decisive, killing blow, the coach tells his team to hold the ball and try to run time off the clock. Ultimately, the team has to kick the ball, then play defense. The opponent subsequently marches down the field in a desperate frenzy and somehow

figures out a way to score just enough points to win the game in the final moments of play.

Sound familiar? Let's face it; we've all seen this scenario unfold at one time or another.

The safety team aboard USS *Kitty Hawk*, however, has taken this lesson to heart. We play to win!

Our concept is focused on the principle that it

The aircraft carrier USS *Kitty Hawk* pulls into Laem Chabang, Thailand, during its summer 2006 cruise.



Navy photo by MC3 Stephen Rowe

takes an uncompromising positive mental attitude to be successful. Safety has a tendency to orient itself on trying not to make mistakes. We look at it the other way: If we concentrate on executing to by-the-book perfection, the chance for errors decreases significantly.

We incorporate many lessons from the sports world to illustrate qualities that are found in winning teams and in winning organizations. Sports are a great medium to illustrate ideas you can link across various shipboard tasks. Most Sailors have played sports, so they can relate to the ideas and then translate the message to their tasks. I try to incorporate winning lessons into all of our ORM briefs for complex evolutions, such as RAS, navigation and missile exercises, which require significant teamwork.

I use golf-swing fundamentals to emphasize repetition of known procedures, and I use basketball free-throw shooting to illustrate that practice makes perfect. I often cite Magic Johnson's ability to make others around him play better and Scotty Bowman's detailed game plans and emphasis on by-the-book game-time execution.

When I discussed the concept and some of my ideas with the commanding officer, Capt. E. P. McNamee, he gave my plan his full support. He liked the positive message. His primary concern was the ominous challenge: how to consistently get the word out to all hands.

"We have a very talented crew of dedicated professionals and an aging asset that remains in top-notch condition," said the CO. "If there's a new way to help us stay focused and striving to be the best, I'm all for it."

When I first came to Yokosuka, DC1 Rodriguez invited me to try out for one of the ship's softball



The author has incorporated many lessons from the sports world into a winning safety program aboard *Kitty Hawk*.

teams. Our first practice wasn't just about throwing around the ball and taking batting practice. We were talking fundamentals, taking infield practice without gloves, setting up game situations, and emphasizing positioning and hitting the cutoff man. I thought to myself: "This is the formula for a winning team."

Despite being a team with a preponderance of engineering personnel and many nights of last-minute line-up shuffling to accommodate work schedules, we went on to win the Yokosuka Class A Intramural Softball Summer 2006 championship. More importantly, we gained the framework for an innovative approach to shipboard safety during our summer 2006 underway period. ■

The author is the ship's safety officer.

